

**John Nelson (1873 - 1936)
and the Origins of
Canadian Participation in APEC**

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Abstract

Canada's "Year of Asia Pacific" is a voyage of rediscovery. To illustrate this point, this paper explores the life and times of John Nelson, who in 1925 led the first Canadian delegation to a meeting of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) - a nongovernmental precursor of the governmental Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and summit which meets in Vancouver this November. Nelson's activities as a journalist, politician, social commentator, opinion leader, founder and Rotarian are reviewed. Of particular interest here is the transformation in Nelson's attitudes towards persons of Asian decent, his roles as a founder of the IPR and Canadian Institute of International Affairs, and the influence of his involvement in Rotary International, an organization which he served as president in 1933-34. When he died in 1936, Nelson was described by a leading magazine as one of Canada's best known citizens, a suggestion which provides a further question examined in this paper: Why do we know so little about this pioneering track two diplomat today?

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I. Introduction¹

The death of John Nelson has removed a Canadian who was perhaps more widely known by face, by voice and by handclasp, than any other citizen of the Dominion outside of the realm of politics. That a few years ago he was International President of Rotary is merely one out of many evidences of his capacity for making friends and for being friendly to his friends. This capacity, combined with a lively and intelligent interest in international problems, enabled him to do much useful work for the advancement of mutual understanding between nations, work which was largely effected through the Institute of International Relations [sic] and the Institute of Pacific Relations. The *Sun Life*, which during the later years of his life employed him as a supervisor of public relations, gave him a large freedom to devote himself to these and other public causes, and is entitled to a good deal of credit for doing so, though we have no doubt that Mr. Nelson's association with that great insurance enterprise brought it full remuneration in prestige at home and friendship abroad.

-- "The Late John Nelson," *Saturday Night*, 8 February 1936, p.3²

As we travel through what the Canadian government has proclaimed the "Year of Asia Pacific" as it prepares to host the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and summit in Vancouver this November,³ most proponents, opponents and observers fail to realize that this voyage of discovery is actually one of rediscovery. It is but another leg in a journey begun in the same port city over seventy years ago, when, in mid-June 1925, John Nelson departed the family home at 2566 York Street and, together with his wife, set sail aboard the SS Maui for Honolulu.⁴ There he would head a small but well-connected Canadian delegation attending the inaugural conference of a nongovernmental experiment known as Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR).⁵ Indeed, despite the impressive epithet presented above - offered by one of the leading national magazines to mark his sudden passing just over a decade later - John Nelson tends to be a forgotten figure in discussions of Canadian diplomatic history, Canada's Pacific profile, and our study of international affairs.

Why he has been largely written out of history will form a central theme in this attempt to address the imbalance evident in the popular perception of Nelson upon his death in 1936 and our understanding of him more than sixty years later. That the editorial staff of *Saturday Night* managed to get the title of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) wrong in their obituary notice provides us with an initial clue as to why Nelson does not occupy what would seem to be his rightful place in history, as does the editorial suggestion that he was more famous than any Canadian "outside of the realm of politics" and the absence of an article on Nelson in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* - making him the only person mentioned as a founder in the entry on the CIIA not to be so honoured.⁶ Who was John Nelson? How did he come to be a respected journalist, lead the Canadian delegation to the first IPR conference, manage

¹ This working paper is a revised version of a presentation to the Canadian Political Science Association, St. John's, Newfoundland, 8-10 June 1997. The author is indebted to Eric Barry, Carol Buenafe, James Cartwright, Denise Carrillo, Edward Greathed, Sue Haralds-Towsley, Peyton Lyon, Jennifer McNenly, Laurence Mussio, Robert Rutherford and Robert Sparrow for their research assistance and wishes to thank William Holland, Paul Hooper, Frank Langdon, Laura Macleod, Kim Richard Nossal, George Oshiro, Benjamin Rogers and Jean Wilson for their constructive comments on earlier drafts.

² This unsigned obituary notice was probably penned by then longtime editor, B.K. Sandwell. Still published today, *Saturday Night* has had its ups and downs, but is generally considered to have been in one of its heydays as a leading national magazine dealing with politics, business and the arts in 1936. J.L. Granatstein, "Saturday Night," *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Vol. 3* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), p.1943.

³ Daphne Bramham, "Unveiling of Logo Kicks Off Canada's Year of the Asia Pacific," *Vancouver Sun*, 15 November 1996, p.D2; Peter C. Newman, "How a Vancouver Summit Fits Liberal Strategies," *Maclean's*, 29 July 1996, p.32.

⁴ Correspondence, folder 4, box B-1, Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) Records, Special Collections, University of Hawaii, Manoa, Manuscripts M00004 (hereafter UHM).

⁵ For an overview of the IPR, see Paul F. Hooper, ed., *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations: The Memoirs of William L. Holland* (Tokyo: Ryukei Shyosha, 1995).

⁶ D.M. Page, "Canadian Institute of International Affairs," *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Vol. 1* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), p.343. The other "prominent Canadians" listed as founders in this article are Sir Robert Borden, Sir Arthur Currie, John W. Daffoe and Sir Joseph Flavelle.

public and international relations for Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada, initiate the CIIA, and be elected president of Rotary International (RI)? Why have these roles been forgotten and, having rediscovered them, what lessons should be learned? Why should we reflect on the life and times of John Nelson today?

An initial response to the latter question is that John Nelson helped to shape the reemergence of Canada's approach to what is in the late twentieth century being termed "track two," unofficial or nongovernmental diplomacy.⁷ In this working paper, I will argue that Nelson's attitudes towards Asia, the peoples of Asia, Asian Canadians and Canada's Asia-Pacific relations were significantly altered as a result of his participation in track two fora. This conclusion makes this review of his life as much a case study in how organizations influenced the life of an individual participant as it is an examination of how an individual participant influenced the lives of various organizations. In advance of the book-length biography I am preparing, I will focus here on Nelson's roles as a journalist, politician, social commentator and founder, as well as the reasons for his fall from historical memory and some of the issues his track two diplomatic efforts raise for the "track one," official diplomacy encompassed by APEC today. My discussion of Nelson's Rotary involvement will be limited to the way it reflects the shift in his attitude towards international relations. An extended review of his corporate activities as the first director of public relations for Sun Life from late 1925 until his death in early 1936 (which included being made a Mohawk chief) will not be attempted;⁸ nor will time and space allow me to address his roles as a poet, essayist, arts critic, and officer of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

The theoretical significance of this analysis lies in exploring the nexus between what is considered inside or outside of the realm of politics, the importance of understanding history, the tendency for nongovernmental figures or activities to fade from that history, and the value of the diplomatic contributions made by civil society over time, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. The study of persons such as John Nelson also marks another step in our examination of the role of nongovernmental organizations in Canada's international relations and approaches to Asia-Pacific regionalism.⁹ Here we move beyond the consideration of ideas and institutions to explore the role of the individual in the promotion of these ideas and institutions.¹⁰ The contemporary relevance, timeliness and practical application of this research are perhaps most apparent when one realizes that this discussion foreshadows the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the CIIA, an organization Nelson succeeded in creating in 1928 to facilitate Canadian participation in the IPR, itself arguably the earliest regional nongovernmental precursor of the intergovernmental APEC.¹¹ Given APEC's increasingly significant role in the globalization of the world economy and the civil society concerns being raised in response to the organization in countries such as Canada, Nelson's role in building networks of persons interested in international and regional relations in the 1920s would seem particularly relevant. Our recent rediscovery of things Asia-Pacific and the federal government's concomitant effort to build input from a broader spectrum of Canadians into the country's foreign policy-making process and international perspective suggest Nelson to be a person both of and ahead of his time.

⁷ Vamik D. Volkan, Demetrios A. Julius, and Joseph V. Montville, eds., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships, Vol. II: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991).

⁸ G.H.H. [George H. Harris], "John Nelson, 1873-1936: An Appreciation," supplement to *The Monthly Agency Review* (Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada), February 1936, p.3, folder: "John Nelson, Director of Public Relations (1873-1936)," box 1173, Sun Life Corporate Archives, Scarborough, Ontario (hereafter SLCA); M. Benson Walker, "Meet Rotary's President," *The Rotarian*, January 1934, p.57.

⁹ Kenneth D. Bush, "NGOs and the International System: Building Peace in a World at War," in Fen Osler Hampson and Maureen Appel Molot, eds., *Canada Among Nations 1996: Big Enough to Be Heard* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996), pp.251-71; Andrew Fenton Cooper and J.-Stefan Fritz, "Bringing the NGOs In: UNCED and Canada's International Environmental Policy," *International Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Autumn 1992), pp.769-817; Andrew F. Cooper, Richard A. Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), pp.81-115; Lawrence T. Woods, "The Asia-Pacific Policy Network in Canada," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), pp.435-45.

¹⁰ On the role of the individual, see Otto Klineberg, *The Human Dimension in International Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Donald P. Warwick, "Transnational Participation and International Peace," in Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp.305-24; and James N. Rosenau, "Citizenship in a Changing Global Order," in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds., *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.272-94.

¹¹ Lawrence T. Woods, *Asia-Pacific Diplomacy: Nongovernmental Organizations and International Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993).

II. Nelson as Journalist

Born to John and Ann Eliza Nelson on 8 March 1873 in Paisley, Ontario,¹² the younger John spent his early years helping his father and two brothers on the 200-acre family farm in Bruce County where he “worked behind the plough and did other chores.”¹³ Educated in Ontario public and high schools, Nelson was “[n]ot content to follow his father’s vocation.”¹⁴ Having nonetheless developed a respect for farming that would emerge in future activities, he moved with his wife of three years, Clara,¹⁵ to British Columbia in 1898, “when the Coast Province was almost as young as its new acquisition.” There he “plunged into newspaper work,”¹⁶ having earlier “tried his hand at writing for the *Paisley Advocate*.” He had “liked the work and so decided to try his fortune in the city and took note of Horace Greeley’s advice, ‘Go West, young man.’ He hopped a cattle train and proceeded west.”¹⁷

Landing a job as “a green cub-reporter for the *Victoria Times*,” he retired from his position as adjutant with the 32nd Battalion in 1899 at the rank of captain (having served five years with the Canadian Militia) and began in earnest what would be an illustrious press career “as one of the youths who [in pursuit of news from afar] beat the pilot boats” to the incoming liners plying the Pacific.¹⁸ He became city editor and, in 1902, managing director of the *Times*. In 1910, he crossed Georgia Strait to become executive head of Vancouver’s morning newspaper, the *News-Advertiser*. Five years later, he purchased the ailing *Vancouver World* with two partners, serving as publisher and editor until he sold his share in 1921. During the latter period, he also launched a farm journal, the *United Farmer*.¹⁹ Along the way, Nelson’s growing reputation and considerable networking skills began to manifest themselves at the national and international levels of his profession. In 1909, he was the lone delegate from BC to attend the first Imperial Press Conference (IPC) in London, England - a gathering of journalists from throughout the British Empire - and, in 1917, he became a founding director of the Canadian Press Association (a coast-to-coast wire-service now known simply as Canadian Press, designed to be the national equivalent of the Associated Press in the US), having formerly been engaged in the Western Associated Press (begun in 1907). Three years later, he attended the second IPC.²⁰

¹² B.M. Greene, ed., *Who’s Who in Canada, 1934-35* (Toronto: International Press, 1935), p.1646.

¹³ “John Nelson is an Active Montrealer,” *Montreal Standard*, 29 December 1934, folder: “John Nelson, Director of Public Relations (1873-1936),” box 1173, SLCA.

¹⁴ “John Nelson,” unsigned typescript, [circa 1935], p.1, folder: “The Late Mr. John Nelson,” box 1173, SLCA.

¹⁵ John and Clara were married in November 1895 and would later have four children (two sons and two daughters). Clara Nelson (nee Armstrong) died on 5 May 1957 at the age of 88. H.J. Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: Briggs, 1912), p.847; “Mrs. John Nelson,” *Montreal Gazette*, 7 May 1957, obituary notice, folder: “The Late Mr. John Nelson,” box 1173, SLCA.

¹⁶ R.J.C.S., “A Montreal Rotarian New International President: An Appreciation,” [1933], folder: “John Nelson, Director of Public Relations (1873-1936),” box 1173, SLCA.

¹⁷ “John Nelson is an Active Montrealer.”

¹⁸ “John Nelson,” unsigned typescript, p.1.

¹⁹ The Wanderer, “I First Saw,” *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 27 March 1930, file: “John Nelson, Director of Public Relations (1873-1936),” box 1173, SLCA.

²⁰ Walker, p.25; “John Nelson is Active Montrealer”; R.J.C.S., “A Montreal Rotarian”; Greene, p.1646. On Nelson’s roles in the Western Associated Press and the Canadian Press Association, see also M.E. Nichols, *CP: The Story of The Canadian Press* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1948).

III. Nelson as Politician

Saturday Night's perception of his fame notwithstanding, it would be a misnomer to believe that Nelson never participated in conventional political activities or that his better known nongovernmental affiliations were themselves "outside of the realm of politics." An active member of the legislative press gallery in Victoria, Nelson's early career was dedicated to the study of local, provincial and national politics. Admired as a public speaker and chairperson, he almost ran for Victoria city council and, in 1917, was offered the Unionist nomination in the federal riding of Vancouver-Burrard.²¹

Nelson's role in the creation, leadership and promotion of a reform-minded political party in BC - the Provincial Party - was his clearest venture into partisan politics. At the same time, one must remember that the Provincial Party was viewed by certain sectors of the electorate to be about countering party politics and political machines. In the parlance of post-modern political studies, it was for many about creating alternative, if not new, political space. Its supporters chose to pursue their goals by working within the existing system but via an alternative vehicle, a tactic familiar to political observers of and participants in federal and provincial politics in the 1990s. As Ian Parker commented in the early 1970s,

The history of British Columbia has been marked by persistent attempts to reform provincial politics. Since 1920, these have frequently taken the form of advocating the election of an efficient non-partisan government unrestricted by organizational ties to federal parties or political "machines." One significant attempt to achieve this goal may be seen in the history of the Provincial Party. Organized in 1922, the party ran forty-one candidates in the 1924 provincial election. It elected three members to the Legislative Assembly, gained 24.2% of the popular vote, helped defeat both the leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties and was credited with deciding the result in thirty-three of the forty-eight provincial ridings. Though the party soon disintegrated, its limited success offers evidence that, even in relative economic and social stability, British Columbia voters were not committed to the traditional two-party system. A reform party, promising the elimination of machine politics and governmental inefficiency, could obtain considerable electoral support.²²

Leading the way was John Nelson, who - in partnership with the likes of former federal politician Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, millionaire Major-General A.D. McRae, and Vancouver Trades and Labour Council secretary Percy Bengough - put together a coalition made up primarily of dissatisfied Conservatives and members of the United Farmers of British Columbia (UFBC) interested in direct political action:²³

Details of the merger are obscure but it seems clear that the link between the two groups was John Nelson, editor of the *United Farmer*, the official journal of the UFBC. Nelson was typical of many British Columbians in that, while formally a Conservative, a frequent correspondent of Arthur Meighen and vice-president of the party's provincial executive, he considered "the introduction of party lines in provincial politics was a matter more of expediency than of conviction."²⁴

The motives of the movement's leaders were not beyond suspicion. As Parker observes, McRae was accused of trying to buy political prominence, while Nelson was said by a rival farm journal to be less interested in reforming provincial politics than he was in exacting revenge on the Conservative Party because it "had failed to adopt his newspaper [the *World*] as the official party organ":

²¹ The Wanderer, "I First Saw."

²² Ian Parker, "The Provincial Party," *BC Studies*, No. 8 (Winter 1970-71), p.17.

²³ Parker, pp.17-20. See also Margaret A. Ormsby, "The United Farmers of British Columbia," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVII (1953), p.61.

²⁴ Parker, p.20. Parker is quoting John Nelson, *The Canadian Provinces: Their Problems and Policies* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1924), p.177. On Nelson's correspondence with Arthur Meighen, see, for example, Roger Graham, *Arthur Meighen: Vol. II - And Fortune Fled* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1963, p.10.

How just these accusations were is impossible to ascertain. Without question, both men were personally ambitious to gain political power but this is true of most politicians. At the same time, there was a genuine disillusionment with the provincial Liberals and Conservatives. While the inspiration for forming the Provincial Party may have been a product of personal ambitions, its growth and electoral support indicates it was also the result of sincere conviction.²⁵

Thus, Nelson can be classed as an aspiring politician in the early 1920s, even if he did not run as a candidate in the 1924 provincial election. Instead, Nelson made his contribution to the campaign as one might have expected, putting his journalistic and publishing skills to work as a writer and editor for *The Searchlight*, “a newspaper-style broadsheet,” the “sole purpose [of which], and one to which it rigidly adhered, was to present the views of the Provincial Party.”²⁶ His many other journalistic and organizational activities may have impeded his potential candidacy, for these years marked the time when his role as social commentator and opinion leader within in Canadian society began to take him regularly beyond BC and Canada. In other words, Nelson’s selling of his interest in the *World* and his subsequent Provincial Party phase coincided with the reassertion of his national and international personalities, his emergence as one of the leading track two diplomats of the inter-war period, and the pursuit of a vision in which he seems to have seen himself as being engaged in and yet above partisan politics. As one commentator on the national scene was moved to observe by the end of the 1920s,

Few men in the Dominion of Canada are better known or more favourably known than John Nelson.... He is something of a man of the world yet retains the high ideals of his youth. He is a dreamer yet has a record for getting things done. He is a highbrow and yet has kept the common touch so well that a few years ago he almost qualified for political leadership. Indeed, as a newspaper man, public speaker, politician and missionary John Nelson has been an outstanding success.²⁷

The description of someone who “almost qualified for political leadership” as “an outstanding success” could be taken as both provocative and insightful. In Nelson’s case, we will also want to reflect on the description of him as “something of a man of the world” and the later depiction of him as a “citizen of the earth.”²⁸ As the next section will show, he might not always have been seen in such a favourable light.

IV. Nelson as Social Commentator and Opinion Leader

Nelson’s international phase rekindled a desire to know and learn about other peoples which was in part a journalist’s stock in trade. This desire had been fostered by his experiences as a young reporter in Victoria and expanded by his attendance at the early IPCs. As a result of diplomatic issues brought to his attention by his participation in these types of meetings, Nelson began to develop a thirst for international angles in his journalistic pursuits. In trying to bring the importance of things international home to his local, provincial and national audiences, he came upon the issue of Asian immigration to Canada. Again, seen from the perspective of the 1990s, in this respect Nelson was a man of and ahead of his time.

Having sold his stake in the *World* and just prior to providing the impetus for the Provincial Party, Nelson entered the immigration debate at the national level in October-November 1921 with a lengthy two-part article in *MacLean’s Magazine*.²⁹ Overtly racist by today’s standards and evocatively

²⁵ Parker, pp.20-21.

²⁶ Parker, pp.22-25.

²⁷ The Wanderer, “I First Saw.”

²⁸ Walker, p.24.

²⁹ John Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, 15 October 1921, pp.15-17, 40-44 (hereafter Part I); and John Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, 1 November 1921, pp.11-12, 45-47 (hereafter Part II). Today rendered simply as

entitled, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” this presentation reflects the tone of the times. In the introduction to the first installment, Nelson is portrayed as a “veteran journalist ... who has been studying for more than a decade this vital question, and who has been investigating from all angles ... for several months past.” Asserting that “[t]his question must not be made a FOOTBALL for politicians” [emphasis in original], the subsidiary questions offered give a clue as to the editorial motive for running this series: “Do you know that in proportion to population, Canada has almost FIVE TIMES as large a Japanese and Chinese population as the United States? Market gardeners in Toronto are complaining of being ousted by Orientals. One person in every eight in BC is an Oriental. Will the yellow race ever predominate in Canada, or on this Continent?”³⁰

For his part, Nelson purports to be engaged in an investigative reporting exercise in which he is canvassing attitudes on all sides of the racial trichotomy which has been constructed for his purpose: “First the red man, then the white, finally the yellow.”³¹ Yet while he tries to portray his title as an open question, his own attitude seeps through at times as he surveys a range of issues: the plight of “Indians ousted by Japs”;³² the challenge posed by the Japanese push for racial equality and political rights in Canada; Japanese attempts to evade immigration laws; the different impacts of Japanese, Chinese and South Asian immigration; the contrasts between Asian and European methods of settlement; the perceived threat to non-Asian interests within various sectors of the Canadian economy; birth rates; the ability of immigrants to shift their loyalties to Canada; Japanese economic and social values; and intermarriage. Running throughout is an underlying concern about the Asian inability to assimilate into what is understood to be Canadian society. The piece rests on the construction of difference and a sense of otherness, on great certainty and assumptions about what is Canadian and what is foreign, and on an inability or reluctance to conceive of a world in which the foreign becomes or is the Canadian. Nelson signals his adherence to this view by his characterization of “the unknown quantity in our national problem which the native-born and the naturalized foreigner presents,” his awareness of the links between things international and domestic notwithstanding.³³ His choice of closing quotation for this series also betrays his position, despite his attempts to be noncommittal (“It is not the purpose of these articles to suggest the pathway out of this vexed situation.... Let the reader answer according to his own lights”) and to laud the foreigner (“If the Oriental is a menace it is not because of his vices. It is rather because of his virtues.... If he be a Japanese, he will be fairly honest, and spotlessly clean. If a Chinaman, more honest, and not so clean”).³⁴ Asserting the need for “our statesmen to find speedily a solution to this problem,” Nelson leaves his readers with a quote from the Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux (a former federal Minister of Labour) that appears to offer a rationalization and justification for “the economic factors coupled with race antipathy and incompatibility of ideals, that are at the bottom of all agitation against the influx of Oriental labor” in BC.³⁵

Six months later Nelson was back in the pages of *MacLean's Magazine* with another major article on the Asian immigration theme. The difference this time was that he had no hesitation about posing an answer to the equally emotive question he now posed: “Shall We Bar the Yellow Race?” Reminding readers of his earlier series “dealing with the nature and extent of the Oriental menace in this country,” he extended his argument by asserting that the problem was of vital interest to all Canadians:

What race is to ultimately occupy Canada's one strip of the Pacific littoral must surely concern every citizen of this country. The steps taken to conserve our national type and our national heritage must be national, not provincial, in character....

Maclean's, the name of this magazine underwent several changes in spelling early in its life. In 1911, Col. J.B. MacLean renamed one of the magazines he owned after himself. Hence, the title of this magazine is presented here the way it was at the time Nelson's articles appeared. The capital “L” was dropped in the 1930s when the magazine adopted its present moniker. Morris Wolfe, “Canada, Weakly,” *Canadian Forum*, June 1997, p.12.

³⁰ Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part I, p.15.

³¹ Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part I, p.16.

³² Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part I, p.15.

³³ Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part I, p.40.

³⁴ Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part II, pp.46-47.

³⁵ Nelson, “Will Canada Go Yellow?,” Part II, p.47.

Canada has the ... right to take the necessary steps to maintain the purity of her racial type. In no other way can she preserve and perpetuate her traditions, her racial ideas, or her national policies. The greatest menace to that course would come in a flood of alien peoples from across the Pacific.

The test of the desirable, as it should be of the admissible immigrant, is his capacity to become assimilated into the social and family life of the nation. Before that test the Asiatic fails.³⁶

Proclaiming Oriental immigrants to be unable to assimilate or be trusted with the franchise because of alien, dissimilar and disadvantaged backgrounds (they “have not had the advantage of upbringing, of environment, of education, of domestic atmosphere, and of all those other intangible factors which exercise such a profound influence in the formation of national character and spirit”), Nelson cloaks his solution to what he sees as the “problems of race” emerging out of Asian immigration in the veil of reciprocity, suggesting that a policy of restrictive immigration and citizenship rights should be applied to all races and that this policy should be reciprocal on a nation-to-nation basis. He cites the Hon. H.H. Stevens, a recent Minister of Trade and Commerce, and former US President Theodore Roosevelt, favourably in this respect. Stevens had earlier suggested in *MacLean's Magazine* that the Canadian government should approach the governments of Japan, India and China seeking a voluntary agreement that they will “restrict emigration to Canada to tourists, bona fide international traders and students in technical or university courses.” If voluntary agreement is not forthcoming, “Canada can safely offer a plan which can give no offence to even the proudest friend or ally. It is that this country proposes to limit the number coming to Canada from Oriental lands to the number of Canadians who annually go to the Orient.” Roosevelt had applied similar principles to Japan alone in likewise showing great fear of allowing into the US anyone whose “work is of a non-international character” and wanted to “become part of the resident working population.”³⁷

Foreshadowing his later role as a track two diplomat and possibly even some of the criticisms leveled by those who see such channels as state-contrived and state-controlled, it was while researching this piece that Nelson started to interact with the Canadian government on Asia-Pacific affairs. As Ohara Yuko notes,

It appears that Nelson's interest in Pacific issues was awakened, in a way not unusual for a British Columbian, by the problem of Asian immigration. In February, 1922, Nelson received a very cordial letter from Loring Christie [legal counsel for the Canadian Department of External Affairs] dealing with the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Nelson subsequently met with Christie and informed him of the direction that opposition to renewal of the alliance was taking in the province of British Columbia; at the same time, he apparently made enquiries about treaties governing immigration between Japan and Canada. Christie told him that the intent of the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement [negotiated by Lemieux], the Japan-United Kingdom trade and naval treaty of 1911, and the Anglo-Japanese alliance was to restrict Japanese emigration to Canada; he asked Nelson to keep him informed on the situation in British Columbia.³⁸

Nelson's “yellow journalism” continued in 1923 with his next - and perhaps best known and respected - series of articles for *MacLean's Magazine*,³⁹ a series later reprinted in book-form under the title, *The Canadian Provinces: Their Problems and Policies*.⁴⁰ The editor who commissioned these articles, J. Vernon McKenzie, in announcing the departure of John Nelson, “master-journalist,” for fieldwork, portrayed this venture as “the most pretentious editorial trip ever taken within this Dominion

³⁶ John Nelson, “Shall We Bar the Yellow Race?,” *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 May 1922, p.13.

³⁷ Nelson, “Shall We Bar the Yellow Race?,” pp.14, 50.

³⁸ Ohara Yuko, “J.W. Dafoe and Japanese-Canadian Relations During the 1920s,” in John Schultz and Miwa Kimitada, eds., *Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.68-69.

³⁹ With each instalment entitled, “The Problems of Our Provinces,” this 1923 series was presented in *MacLean's Magazine* in ten parts. On the Prairie provinces, see 15 May, pp.13-14, 56-61; 1 June, pp.18-19, 64-65; and 15 June, pp.18-19, 47-48. On the Maritimes, see 15 July, pp.18-19, 37-38; 15 August, pp.16-17, 61; and 1 September, pp.16-17. On Quebec, see 15 September, pp.20-21, 37-39. On Ontario, see 1 October, pp.18-19, 48-49. On BC, see 15 October, pp.17-18, 38-39. For the conclusion, see 15 November, pp.13-15, 49-50.

⁴⁰ Nelson, *The Canadian Provinces*.

by a Canadian journalist.... In this work he will have the active co-operation of all the premiers of Canada, as well as of the leading politicians, editors, and business and professional men of each province.”⁴¹

In the introduction to the subsequent book, the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, recently deposed as prime minister, praises the author for exemplary and constructive contributions to national unity.⁴² Nelson himself opens his series with a cautious statement which reasserted his keen interest in and awareness of the fallacious domestic/international dichotomy: “Canada shares with other nations the problems which grow out of international relations. She is increasingly concerned with those which result from her membership in the Imperial Commonwealth. But she is most constantly employed with those questions of internal extension and adjustment upon which the proper solution of her progress and her unity depends.”⁴³ In his chapter on BC, he again plays the race card to bolster his call for greater national support of local exclusionary initiatives. Eerily echoing contemporary enthusiasts with his depiction of the province as “Canada’s interpreter to Asia,” he asserts in epic terms that it is also “one of the last frontiers of the white race against the yellow and brown.”⁴⁴ The Japanese component of the “ever present Oriental problem” troubles Nelson most (“They are not disclosed to accept a secondary position to the whites, either socially or commercially, and they press with much vigor for political recognition. This they are excluded from in British Columbia though in few other provinces”) and, fearing further racial conflict, he argues for the Canadian refusal of naturalization and the franchise on the grounds that the “private law of Japan seems clearly to refuse the release of any of its subjects whether born at home or abroad, from citizenship in their Empire even though they may have become naturalized, unless by special permission of the government in Tokyo.”⁴⁵

As if to indicate the timeliness of Nelson’s tour and the representative nature of the views he expressed, the federal government proclaimed the Chinese Immigration Act on 1 July 1923. This Act, formalizing a policy of exclusion, remained in place until it was struck down in 1947. During this period, only seven Chinese nationals were admitted to Canada. Japanese immigration was also sharply reduced with the 1928 renegotiation of the 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement between Canada and Japan, before being completely halted with the outbreak of war in 1941. An ability to assimilate remained a requirement for immigration through the late 1950s; it was not until 1962 that race was removed as a criteria for admission.⁴⁶

V. Nelson as Founder: The IPR-CIIA Connection

Nelson’s sensitivity to the immigration issue area was heightened by his role as the regional director for BC on the Survey of Race Relations on the Pacific Coast, an exercise chaired by Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Leyland Stanford University and later Secretary of the Interior under President Hoover. The Survey was organized in 1923 by several persons prominent in the earliest discussions leading to the subsequent formation of the IPR. Cognizant of the value of promoting cross-cultural communication in the pursuit of peaceful relations among the peoples and states of the Asia-Pacific region, many of these individuals were also leading members of the YMCA and thus moved in similar nongovernmental circles to those frequented by Nelson, who was himself affiliated with the YMCA and Rotary. His connection to the Survey was a major reason he was approached in 1925 to play the role of

⁴¹ J. Vernon McKenzie, “In the Editor’s Confidence,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, 1 March 1923, p.2.

⁴² Arthur Meighen, “Introduction,” in Nelson, *The Canadian Provinces*, pp.vi-vii.

⁴³ John Nelson, “The Problems of Our Provinces (I. The Prairie Provinces and Their Problems),” *MacLean’s Magazine*, 15 May 1923, p.13.

⁴⁴ Nelson, *The Canadian Provinces*, pp.171-72.

⁴⁵ Nelson, *The Canadian Provinces*, pp.187-89.

⁴⁶ Patricia Roy, “Not All Were Welcome: Canada and the Dilemma of Immigration,” in John Schultz and Miwa Kimitada, *Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.2-16; Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

lead Canadian delegate to the inaugural conference of the IPR, also chaired by Wilbur.⁴⁷ Moreover, coming as it did on the heels of his research for the aforementioned sets of articles in *MacLean's Magazine*, Nelson's involvement in the Survey marks the beginning of a transformation in his thoughts on these matters which is detectable in his writings, a transformation which would also be influenced by his participation in the IPR and CIIA.

Indeed, in order to understand the place of the IPR and CIIA in the history of Canada's international relations, it seems logical to begin by examining the all but ignored initial driving force behind Canadian participation: John Nelson. Given that his examinations and commentaries on Asian immigration in many ways reflect what would be referred to in the contemporary Canadian debate on immigration policy as a conservative or racist attitude, an instrumental rationale would posit Nelson as seeking to participate in the 1925 Honolulu meeting of the IPR as part of a blocking or nondecision-making strategy.⁴⁸ He would argue the merits of restrictive Canadian immigration policies against those who called for greater tolerance and cross-cultural understanding. This view gains credibility when one reads the opening address delivered by Nelson as leader of the Canadian delegation, even though we know of his direct connections to the organizers of the meeting through his involvement in the Survey of Race Relations on the Pacific Coast.⁴⁹ From Ohara's perspective,

Nelson made his own position clear in a speech at the first Honolulu conference, in which he argued that British Columbia was threatened with an "economic invasion" by Asian immigrants. Nelson's position was not simply racist, however; rather his concern was the extent to which immigrants who spoke in a non-Western language and had different cultural values could be successfully "Canadianized."... In fact, Nelson was quite satisfied with the limitations on Asian immigration then in force; his primary concern was the issue of citizenship for those already in Canada. He believed that civil rights should not be granted until the immigrant had fully assimilated the Canadian way of life, and all of his efforts toward establishing branches of the IPR in various regions of Canada could be said to spring from his wish for a forum in which Canadians and Asian immigrants could further their mutual understanding.⁵⁰

In light of his earlier correspondence with Loring Christie, Nelson's speech - in which he echoed ideas found in his *MacLean's Magazine* articles - makes one wonder if the initiation of Canadian participation in the IPR should be seen as an example of state-contrived unofficial diplomacy. But while he sought to defend Canadian attitudes and government policy against those who saw race restrictions as being at the root of international conflict, from this point forward Nelson seems to have been transformed.

Following his participation in Honolulu and his encounters with leading members of Asian societies, Nelson became a fervent supporter of the IPR process, the value of unofficial/nongovernmental diplomacy, and the need for Canadian involvement in such efforts. He was also charged with securing British participation through the British (later Royal) Institute of International Affairs, a task at which he soon succeeded.⁵¹ More importantly, Nelson's reservations with respect to race dissipated along the way. In the parlance of contemporary international relations, he moved from a realist to an idealist point of view, from a nationalist's defence of nondecision-making to an internationalist's spirit of cooperation.

⁴⁷ John Nelson, "Canada's Concern in the Pacific," *MacLean's Magazine*, 1 November 1928, pp.15-16, 56, 58; Walker, pp.25, 56; Ohara, pp.73-74. See also various correspondence, lists and minutes in folders 2-3, box B-1, IPR Records, UHM. The findings of the Survey are discussed by several of the key participants (but not Nelson) in a collection of articles presented under the title, "East by West: Our Windows on the Pacific," in a graphic number of *The Survey*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (1 May 1926).

⁴⁸ Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁴⁹ John Nelson, "Canadian View of Pacific Relations," in IPR, ed., *Institute of Pacific Relations, Honolulu Session, June 30-July 14, 1925: History, Organization, Proceedings, Discussions and Addresses* (Honolulu: IPR, 1925), pp.65-68. The participant list in this volume (pp.35-40) indicates that the other members of the Canadian delegation were M.L. [Mary] Bollert (Dean of Women, University of British Columbia, and member of the National Council of Education, Vancouver), Stanley Brent (National Council Secretary, YMCA of Western Canada, Vancouver), George H. Cowan (lawyer, Vancouver), Mrs. Percival Foster (Field Secretary, Dominion Council, YMCA, Toronto), and Newton W. Rowell (lawyer and president of Executive Council of the Dominion of Canada cabinet during World War, Toronto). Albert G. Virtue (lawyer, Lethbridge) is listed as an associate member.

⁵⁰ Ohara, pp.67-69.

⁵¹ Edward D. Greathed, "Antecedents and Origins of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs," in Harvey L. Dyck and H. Peter Krosby, eds., *Empire and Nations: Essays in Honour of Frederic H. Soward* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp.91-115.

Signs of a shift even appear in the minutes of executive committee meetings at the first IPR conference which record Nelson arguing unsuccessfully in favour of the inclusion of a Korean delegation in the face of a stiff Japanese demand that the then colonized Koreans be excluded. Like his involvement in RI, Nelson's staunch defence of Korean and Filipino participation suggests that he was beginning to take on elements of a rather more tolerant and liberal perspective than is revealed by his official statement on behalf of the Canadian delegation.⁵² As such, it becomes an early example of a role to be played by Canadians in the contemporary regional cooperation movement: the mediation of membership debates and disputes.⁵³

While one might have suspected these leanings given his ongoing involvement in Rotary, stronger evidence of their development is found in Nelson's report on the inaugural IPR conference for *MacLean's Magazine*.⁵⁴ As he observes there, "Honolulu leaves many predilections and prejudices topsyturvy in the attic of the Caucasian mind."⁵⁵ Entitled "Forestalling a Fight in the Pacific," his report still comments favourably on the virtues of homogeneity and places national unification ahead of international cooperation, thereby affirming Akami Tomoko's recent observation that within inter-war idealism lay the seeds of its own destruction, namely its residual state-centric approach to international affairs.⁵⁶ But, just as in his earlier note about the site of the conference, one begins to see a change in mindset in his positive closing comments on the Asian interpretation of Christianity. His attitude towards what should be done at the national level to promote our understanding of things Pacific and help prevent regional conflict is also illuminating: "Canadian universities might take some steps to attract [Asian] students; and might increase their facilities for the study of Oriental languages and history. Graduates in these should man our immigration staffs and our consular offices in the East. Greater contact and intercourse would do much to forestall misunderstandings and to facilitate and foster trade."⁵⁷

Soon after returning to Canada, Nelson was appointed as the inaugural supervisor of public relations for the multinational Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada in Montreal. His networking and journalistic efforts had caught the eye of company president T.B. Macaulay, who understood the value of having a skilled communicator and track two diplomat on staff as an international spokesperson, especially given the firm's extensive operations in Asia. Nelson's future track two initiatives would thus have the support of his new employer, often with senior company executives such as Macaulay actively participating.⁵⁸ While this change of locale took Nelson away from the Pacific coast, it had the advantage of bringing him closer to the corridors of power and influence in central Canada. As part of the Montreal-Toronto-Ottawa elite triangle, he was able to attract many leading figures in political, business and academic circles as supporters of what was essentially a project driven by Nelson's enthusiasm alone: the creation of a Canadian organization which would serve as the national liaison with the nascent IPR. Having facilitated the formation of informal local IPR branches in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal in 1926-27, he gained the endorsement of people such as the lawyer and Liberal politician, Newton W. Rowell. Rowell suggested modeling the new Canadian organization after the British Institute of International Affairs and in turn enlisted the support of former prime minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert

⁵² Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, IPR, 3 and 4 July 1925, folder 3, box B-1, IPR Records, UHM.

⁵³ See, for example, Lawrence T. Woods, "Delicate Diplomatic Debuts: Chinese and Soviet Participation in the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp.210-27.

⁵⁴ John Nelson, "Forestalling a Fight in the Pacific," *MacLean's Magazine*, 1 October 1925, pp.15, 49, 51-52.

⁵⁵ Nelson, "Forestalling," p.52.

⁵⁶ Akami Tomoko, "Between *anzen hoshō* and *shakai hoshō*: The Concept of Security of Royama Masamichi and Inter-War Liberals at the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1928-1945," Paper prepared for presentation to the International Studies Association, Toronto, 19 March 1997.

⁵⁷ Nelson, "Forestalling," p.52.

⁵⁸ Walker, p.57. Catching the attention of the Sun Life president and obtaining this high profile job with a major Canadian multinational corporation maintaining considerable Asian operations would have been quite a coup for Nelson. I am indebted to Laurence B. Mussio, Historian, Sun Life Corporate History Project, and Robert L. Sparrow, Archivist, Sun Life Corporate Archives, for these observations. Sun Life's Asian exposure and the number of executives it encouraged to engage in track two diplomatic fora such as the IPR, CIA and Rotary make it similar to Alcan, which in the contemporary context has devoted numerous executive hours devoted to regional business associations such as the Pacific Basin Economic Council and the Canada-Japan Business Cooperation Committee. See Lawrence T. Woods, "The Business of Canada's Pacific Relations," *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 1987), pp.410-25.

Borden. Such assistance helped Nelson accomplish his larger goal in Ottawa on 30 January 1928 with the formal establishment and first executive meeting of the Toronto-based CIIA, to which he immediately became secretary.⁵⁹ Within the IPR itself, Nelson's expertise in media matters was highly valued and, as a member of the Canadian delegations to the 1927 Honolulu, 1929 Kyoto and 1933 Banff conferences, he was invariably sought out for his comments on the IPR's effort to foster good relations with the press, especially since many of the Institute's deliberations were off the record or not for attribution in order to encourage the free and frank debate which became the hallmark of its round table method.⁶⁰

As his participation in the IPR evolved, so did Nelson's attitude towards the relations between peoples of different backgrounds. His *MacLean's Magazine* report on the 1927 conference, in which he connected his social and business interests, provides perhaps one of the best and most complete perspectives on this attitudinal journey. In so doing, it confirms Nelson's emergence as a person attempting to bridge the gap between the media and humanitarians in order to influence public awareness and policy-makers, something recently called for in the context of the international response to contemporary religious and ethnic conflict.⁶¹ Curiously introduced by a photo supplied by Nelson which presents all Commonwealth delegates as "British members" of the IPR, this article begins by emphasizing Canada's predominantly European heritage and western migrations ("The Pacific is only casually in her deeper historical backgrounds")⁶² - before moving to suggest that "[a]ll her racial prejudices, all her national preferences, grow out of her origins. It is well to remember this, for it has a vital bearing on much of our national thinking that is otherwise hard to understand." Foreshadowing the language of Pacific enthusiasts in the 1990s, he assesses Canada's Pacific interests as follows:

Canada is a near neighbor to the Orient and face to face with all that is involved in the problems and contacts of the neighborhood.... It becomes vital, therefore, to know who these neighbors are, why they are quarreling among themselves, and why they are so bitterly resentful toward us. Because the growth of our business relations must, to a considerable degree, wait on the development of our social relations. If the latter remain unresolved, the former must continue to be unsatisfactory. If we can sweeten our human contacts, we will greatly facilitate our financial ones.⁶³

Though still using what would today be firmly deemed offensive phraseology ("Among the Siwashes of Vancouver Island may still be seen the slant eyes and other racial characteristics which suggest that ancient amours of an aboriginal maid with a bequeued visitor from Canton"), Nelson was now more appreciative in his attitude towards the peoples and cultural diversity of the Pacific. The superiority complex underlying his earlier work had yielded further and he was now quite forceful in his condemnation of efforts to exclude Asians and the tendency to forget their contributions to the building of

⁵⁹ CIIA, "The Canadian Institute of International Affairs: Its Organization, Objects and Constitution," CIIA, May 1929, in *Minutes of National Council and Executive Committee and Research Committee* (hereafter *CIIA Minutes*), Vol. I: January 1st, 1928-December 1934, Canadian Institute of International Affairs Archives (CIIA Archives). This account of the CIIA IPR roots and its other affiliations was likely prepared by Nelson after he suggested to the Executive Council that "if a small pamphlet were prepared giving the history and outlining of the organization of the [CIIA], it would facilitate its extension." See "Agenda, Executive Council, CIIA, January 21st, 1929," p.2, in *CIIA Minutes*, Vol. I, CIIA Archives. On the CIIA's origins, see also Greathed, 91-115; T.B. Millar, "Commonwealth Institutes of International Affairs," *International Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 1977-78), pp.10-13; and Ohara, pp.67-69. A 1926 letter written by the IPR's general secretary lists Nelson as secretary of the "Canadian National Institute Council." J. Merle Davis to Beardsley Ruml, 3 December 1926, folder 582, box 54, series III-6, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, NY (hereafter RAC). A 1936 CIIA application for Rockefeller Foundation (RF) funding states that the CIIA was founded in 1927. J.M. Macdonnell to the President, RF, 15 April 1936, folder 310, box 30, series 427, record group (RG) 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives (RFA), RAC. A 1928 CIIA membership list appears in "Council Interest: Canada," *Pacific Affairs*, June 1928, pp.17-19.

⁶⁰ On Nelson's role as an advisor to the IPR on media relations, see IPR, ed., "Round Table #2: The Future of the Institute," 28 July 1927, Second Session, 9-14, folder B.1.3, box 79-2, IPR Papers, Special Collections Library (SCL), University of British Columbia (UBC); Charles L. Loomis, Acting General Secretary, IPR, to John Nelson, 10 January 1931, Manuscript Group (MG) 28 I250, vol. 4, CIIA-John Nelson Papers (1930/32), National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (NAC). The enclosure accompanying the latter item provides an Associated Press journalist's detailed critique of the IPR's practice of closing round table sessions to the media. This letter artfully claims that the so-called experts on hand "propound prodigious piffle under the shelter of this secrecy." Glenn Babb to Charles F. Loomis, 19 November 1930, MG 28 I250, vol. 4, CIIA-John Nelson Papers (1930/32), NAC.

⁶¹ Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises* (Washington/Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution/World Peace Foundation, 1996), pp.v-vi.

⁶² Nelson, "Canada's Concern," p.15.

⁶³ Nelson, "Canada's Concern," p.16.

Canada: “Total exclusion of the Orientals was long a ready slogan of the aspiring politician in the Pacific province, and the approach of a general election could generally be accurately fixed by the frequency with which it was invoked. The records of British Columbia’s legislature contain some of grotesque relics of that period in unique devices to compass the exclusion of the Oriental without the risk of Imperial disallowance of the statute.” The “aspiring politician” referred to here could well have been Nelson himself! The reason for this personal transformation - the educating of John Nelson, his conversion to idealism - was also confirmed:

Saner methods followed in a comprehensive and scientific survey in recent years to determine all the facts connected with the impingement of Oriental on Occidental on the Pacific slope. Some outstanding students were engaged in this survey. But, while important and valuable data were obtained, and, for the first time, a real exploration was made into the human factors and emotions that were involved, the investigators soon became conscious of a great undertow of racial resentment and prejudice, difficult to fathom and impossible to explain. They were made acutely aware that, in a world which has become strangely small, the great problem is to learn racial accommodation, and how to live together in peace. They were made painfully conscious that the Oriental problem could no longer be solved by attacking the Chinese as a menace, nor even studying him as an exhibit, but that he must be met and dealt with in confidence and co-operation as a human being - and as a man. On no other basis can good-will be established....

Hence the [IPR]. Hence the [CIIA]. Hence the new and helpful interest of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and of several organizations of a similar character in the United States. These institutions are bringing a new technique into the study of international relations. They find much in our Eastern experience of late to confirm their fear that events are marching faster than the legs of diplomacy. They are beginning to distrust government processes and departmental methods as archaic, and as a survival of a day when all nations feared, because they did not know, one another; and when a neighbor country was one which must conquer or be conquered. Much of that attitude survives in modern government which is more alert in organizing to fight than wise in qualifying for peaceful neighborliness. The Institutes in question are firm believers in the invincibility of informed good-will.

They have no cure to prescribe, no policy to suggest. They are relying more on the form of approach to these problems. Hence, they pass no resolutions and submit no schemes. They are concerned with finding facts, and in finding as well why Oriental and Occidental put such different construction upon the same facts.⁶⁴

He further urged Canadians to see that in the Pacific region “[t]here lies not only a tremendous market for our trade but an opportunity for leadership in international matters of vital moment to this Dominion.”⁶⁵

As an indication of the significance and breadth of Nelson’s role as a leader and organizer of Canadian delegations beyond the inaugural IPR conference, one finds the editors of *Saturday Night* in 1929 echoing Rowell’s recollection that “Canada first took part in an extensive way in this biennial conference at Honolulu in 1927 when Sir Arthur Currie and Mr. John Nelson of Montreal were among the more prominent of the delegates from this country.”⁶⁶ In a separate article Lawrence Burpee, secretary of the International Joint Commission and a Canadian delegate to the 1929 Kyoto conference, remarks on the respect earned by the performance of the Canadian group, especially John Nelson.⁶⁷ Though not a neutral observer, Burpee was particularly impressed by the expertise the Canadian group brought to bear

⁶⁴ Nelson, “Canada’s Concern,” pp.16, 56.

⁶⁵ Nelson, “Canada’s Concern,” pp.15-16.

⁶⁶ “Institute of Pacific Relations,” *Saturday Night*, 21 December 1929, p.1.

⁶⁷ Lawrence J. Burpee, “Canada at the Kyoto Conference,” *Saturday Night*, 21 December 1929, p.2.

on subjects seemingly far from Canadian interests, such as Manchuria - another topic on which Nelson had conducted first-hand research, as seen in a subsequent contribution to *MacLean's Magazine*.⁶⁸

As for his other formal roles in the CIIA context, Nelson continued to serve the organization he helped create, in order to facilitate Canadian participation in the IPR, as honorary secretary (1932-34) and vice-president (1934-36),⁶⁹ his involvement being somewhat curtailed as he rose to become the international president of Rotary International (1933-34). The CIIA would serve as the national secretariat for participation in the IPR until the latter organization finally succumbed in 1960 to wounds inflicted upon its international operations by Senator Joseph McCarthy's communist witch-hunt in the United States during the early 1950s.⁷⁰ Along the way, the IPR became widely recognized as the premier regional organization for research and dialogue on Pacific problems. In addition to Canada, national, member or local councils and representatives from seventeen other countries and territories, including most major world powers, would be engaged in the activities of the Institute to varying degrees over time: Australia, Burma, Ceylon, China, France, Great Britain, Hawaii, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Soviet Union, and the United States.⁷¹ Seeking to "study the conditions of the Pacific peoples with a view to the improvement of their mutual relations,"⁷² the IPR took up a range of subjects we in the post-Cold War world would associate with the so-called redefinition of security in all of its social, environmental, economic, governmental and military manifestations. Immigration policies, cultural relations, the treatment of aliens and native peoples, standards of living, working conditions, population growth, food supply, land utilization, natural resources, foreign investment, trade barriers, economic policies, industrialization, public opinion, international education, the role of the media, diplomatic structures, China, and armaments were all agenda items at the Institute's initial biennial encounters.⁷³ Demonstrating its awareness of what would become a major post-modern concern, the IPR also attempted to tackle the role of gender in its activities and organizational structure.⁷⁴ The inclusion in the earliest Canadian delegations of Mary Bollert, the first Dean of Women at the University of British Columbia (UBC), aided this effort.⁷⁵

Institute conferences brought together national delegations composed of prominent and informed figures from a variety of societal sectors for free and frank deliberations. As T.L. McIlwraith, a University of Toronto anthropologist and delegate to the 1927 Honolulu gathering, observed, "No better proof could be given of the importance of Pacific problems in the world's history than the presence of such a group, representing so many widely diverse lines of thought."⁷⁶ Burpee offers this explanation of the logic behind the IPR's experimental approach to international affairs:

It would be idle, of course, to pretend that the delegates ... are able to divest themselves entirely of national prejudices or antipathies, or to look quite dispassionately at questions in which the welfare of their individual countries is vitally involved. Most people would rather despise them

⁶⁸ John Nelson, "Manchuria's War Lord," *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 July 1930, pp.18, 30, 34-35. Nelson's son, Clarence, attended the Kyoto conference as a secretary for the Canadian group. J.B. Condliffe, ed., *Problems of the Pacific, 1929: Proceedings of the Third Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Nara and Kyoto, Japan, October 23 to November 9, 1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), pp.624-25.

⁶⁹ Greathed, pp.91-115. The initial 1936 CIIA application for RF funding does note that "the creation of the [CIIA] in 1927 was in large part due to the desire of Canadians who attended the first [IPR conference in 1925] to establish a national council of that Institute in Canada," but subsequent CIIA applications omit this point. J.M. Macdonnell to the President, RF, 15 April 1936, folder 310, box 30, series 427, RG 1.1, RFA, RAC.

⁷⁰ John N. Thomas, *The Institute of Pacific Relations: Asian Scholars and American Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974).

⁷¹ John K. Fairbank, "William L. Holland and the IPR in Historical Perspective," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 52, No. 4 (Winter 1979-80), pp.587-89; Paul F. Hooper, "The Institute of Pacific Relations and the Origins of Asian and Pacific Studies," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 61, No.1 (Spring 1988), pp.98-121; IPR, "Institute of Pacific Relations, Pacific Council 1953, Minutes No. 2, February 6, 1953," pp.1-9, folder 4259, box 359, series 200, RG 1.1, RFA, RAC.

⁷² "Constitution of the Institute of Pacific Relations," in J.B. Condliffe, ed., *Problems of the Pacific: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 15 to 29, 1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), p.607.

⁷³ Lawrence T. Woods, "Rediscovering Security," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 1997), pp.79-102.

⁷⁴ Perhaps the most famous female staff was Barbara Tuchman. See Hooper, ed., *Remembering the Institute*, pp.298-301. See also, Burpee, p.2.

⁷⁵ Mary Bollert attended the first and fifth IPR conferences in 1925 and 1933. When she died in July 1945, she was president of the Pan-Pacific Women's Association. On Bollert, see Lee Stewart, *"It's Up to You": Women at UBC in the Early Years* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), pp.69-75.

⁷⁶ T.F. McIlwraith, "Institute of Pacific Relations," *Canadian Forum*, December 1927, pp.462-63.

if they were that almost impossible type of cold-blooded internationalist. But it is true that out of such a friendly discussion comes the realization that, while the other fellow's point of view may be faulty, it is neither so impossible nor so unreasonably selfish as one thought it to be, and we each throw off the armour of national prejudice and begin to feel our way toward common ground. All things are possible when men are willing to sit down and throw all their cards upon the table. One of the Chinese delegates at Honolulu two years ago quoted a saying of Confucius, "to know all is to forgive all."⁷⁷

The scope of the Institute's attention admittedly narrowed quickly. When it met in Banff in 1933 - Canada's first opportunity to play host - economic conflict and Japanese expansionism overshadowed other matters. As if to signal the challenge to Nelson's institutional and societal aspirations, even the usually friendly *Saturday Night* ran an article representative of a return to yellow journalism and the prevailing government policy immediately prior to the Banff conference.⁷⁸ With World War II looming, the IPR could not avoid the vicissitudes of the nationalism and militarism swirling around it. While the Allies utilized its meetings to craft the post-war global and regional order, the IPR's cable address - INPAREL - eventually proved literally prophetic.⁷⁹

Even so, when the IPR was disbanded in late 1960, Nelson's influence was felt once again. As a young scholar of international law at the University of Toronto, Norman MacKenzie had been present at the inaugural meeting of the CIIA (holding proxies for Sir Joseph Flavelle and Newton Rowell)⁸⁰ alongside Nelson and played a major research role in establishing Canada's Pacific credentials via the IPR. Now, as president of UBC, MacKenzie succeeded in rescuing and bringing to Vancouver the Institute's key international assets: its respected journal (still issued today as *Pacific Affairs*) and publications back list (from which arose UBC Press). On campus, these enduring features of the IPR legacy joined the Nitobe Memorial Garden - created in 1959-60 in memory of Nitobe Inazô, a distinguished Japanese participant who died in Victoria in 1933 shortly after the Banff conference⁸¹ - and were complemented by the arrival of William Holland, who - having worked for the IPR since 1929 and served as its last secretary general - moved with these assets to become the first chair of UBC's newly created Department of Asian Studies (the precursor to the university's Institute of Asian Research, today home to the venerable and rejuvenated table used by the IPR's executive body, the Pacific Council).⁸² Later, archival records pertaining to E.H. (Herbert) Norman, a noted IPR contributor, would come to rest alongside IPR materials deposited at UBC by Holland. Another victim of McCarthyism, Norman was a brilliant Canadian scholar-diplomat whose tragic death by suicide on 4 April 1957 foreshadowed the end of the Institute and must also be commemorated during our Year of Asia Pacific.⁸³

⁷⁷ Burpee, p.2.

⁷⁸ F.J. Savage, "Has White Control of World Affairs Ended?," *Saturday Night*, 12 August 1933, pp.17, 22, 24.

⁷⁹ Akami Tomoko, "The Rise and Fall of a 'Pacific Sense': Experiment of the IPR, 1925-1930," *Journal of Shibusawa Studies*, No. 7 (1994), pp.2-37; Sandra Wilson, "The Manchurian Crisis and Moderate Japanese Intellectuals: The Japan Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (July 1992), pp.507-44.

⁸⁰ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Executive Council of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Glensmere, Ottawa, 30 January 1928, p.1, attached to Sir Arthur Currie to John Nelson, 27 February 1928, in *CIIA Minutes, Vol. III: January 1st, 1937-December 31st, 1938*, CIIA Archives.

⁸¹ On Nitobe, his IPR involvement, and the Nitobe Memorial Garden, see John F. Howes, ed., *Nitobe Inazô: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

⁸² Hooper, ed., *Remembering the Institute*, pp.73, 404, 413-17.

⁸³ Roger Bowen, *Innocence Is Not Enough: The Life and Death of Herbert Norman* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986); Roger W. Bowen, ed., *E.H. Norman: His Life and Scholarship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Lawrence T. Woods, "In the Spirit of Norman and Nitobe: Circularity in Japanese and Canadian Approaches to Regional Institution Building," in Michael Fry, Mitsuru Kurosawa, and John Kirton, eds., *The North Pacific Triangle: The United States, Japan and Canada at Century's End* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), forthcoming.

VI. Nelson as Rotarian

Upon Nelson's sudden death in early 1936, a Rotary International circular outlined the past president's lengthy involvement with the organization:

John joined the Rotary Club of Vancouver in 1917 and was president of that club in 1923. Upon his removal to Montreal, he became a member of the Rotary Club of Montreal in 1925, and was a member of the Canadian Advisory Committee from 1926 to 1928. In 1929-30 he served as governor of the 28th district and two years later was elected to membership on the board of directors of Rotary International, serving as third vice-president. In 1932-33 he was chairman of the aims and objects committee, member of the convention committee and of the Rotary Foundation promotion committee. In 1933-34, John was elected president of Rotary International. The following year he served on the board as immediate past president and also became a trustee of the Rotary Foundation and a member of the commission on location of RI conventions. During the present Rotary year, he has been a member of the international service committee in addition to his [other committee] memberships.⁸⁴

These activities will not be analyzed in detail here. Rather, they are recounted because they overlap with other activities noted above which helped shape Nelson's intellectual development during the latter part of his life. While perhaps exaggerating somewhat given the range of his activities and experiences over time, Nelson nonetheless summarized the impact of Rotary on his life just weeks before his death: "It was Rotary that showed me the foolishness of harboring a grudge and the importance of being *willing* (the emphasis is his) to be open minded."⁸⁵ Extending this admission while making the link between his friend's business and service roles, Arthur B. Wood - Sun Life president and fellow Rotarian - eulogized Nelson as follows:

It is to be observed that all the major movements which won his allegiance and commanded his enthusiasms were international in their scope and beneficent in their aims. He saw those characteristics in the mission and character of the company with which he was connected, and, consequently, was able to dedicate to its service, as to his freely elected interests, the highest quality of energy and ardour.

He saw in insurance a powerful factor in the support of the home and of family life, and as a means of avoiding many of the miseries to which humanity is exposed. Here, then, was a system based on sound morality, expressing itself in the social advantage, and bringing benefit to all, of whatever country or condition of life. Often he drew the analogy between these services, operated on a vast scale, and those to which Rotary and similar organizations are dedicated, and to which they owe their inspiration - the extending of the helping hand, the bringing of hope and opportunity in times of affliction, the general bettering of human conditions.⁸⁶

It is not surprising then that perhaps the most definitive presentation of his attitude towards international affairs late in his life should appear in a Rotary publication. Having just received an honorary LL.D. degree from Alfred University (Alfred, NY), the newly-elected RI president, Dr. "Jack" Nelson, explained his philosophy to an interviewer from *The Rotarian*:

We were all one people at one time, a savage people perhaps. We multiplied and migrated. Some went west and some went east. Some went south and their skins were sun colored.

Presently we formed tribes and then nations. Now we have armies and navies of our own, and we have forgotten or deny that we are one people.

⁸⁴ Chesley R. Perry, "John Nelson Passes Away," Circular Letter from the General Secretary, Rotary International, No. 20 (1935-36), 25 January 1936.

⁸⁵ "John Nelson: An Epilogue," *The Rotarian*, March 1936, p.22.

⁸⁶ "Late John Nelson Honored by Rotary," *The Monthly Agency Review*, February 1936, p.8 (reprinted from the *Montreal Gazette*, 30 January 1936), in folder: "John Nelson, Director of Public Relations (1873-1936)," box 1173, SLCA.

Yet in the last generation we have again become one neighborhood. That is due to science and invention. Now you know at your breakfast table what has happened half the world away far sooner than your grandfather knew what happened that night in his neighbor's back yard.

Science has done this for us. But science has failed to do other things. We are paying the price for these failures now. For science brought into close contact peoples who are not yet educated to neighborliness - people whom even science cannot induce to live together in peace and harmony.

Indeed, science has put into the hands of both savage and civilized man weapons so horrible that we are in terror of their use. It is because governments have recognized this gulf - this time lag - between physical and social progress that they have tried to bridge it with the League of Nations, with treaties, and with covenants.

Now I don't believe it's of much avail if MacDonalld or Roosevelt merely sign treaties of friendship. But if you get men of common interests and occupations, limiting themselves to a common ideal of peace, then you get something really valuable.

In Rotary we have men in seventy-five countries banded together in perfectly unselfish union, - pledged to friendship. That brings war to a personal basis. If you say "War with Austria," that means to me that I've got to kill Otto Boehler in Vienna. If you say "War with Japan," it means I must kill Yoneyama in Tokyo.

To Rotarians that is little else than civil war - for it is a war with our brethren. For Rotary is mobilizing individual goodwill around the world. It has, indeed, declared a perpetual moratorium on ill-will.⁸⁷

So spoke one of Canada's first leading track two diplomats. His intellectual transformation complete, John Nelson had come a long way.

VII. Forgetting John Nelson

So why do John Nelson and his accomplishments appear to have been largely forgotten? After all, when he died in a room at Chicago's Bismarck Hotel on the evening of 24 January 1936, days after suffering a heart attack while in the city with his wife to attend a Rotary function and just six weeks short of his sixty-third birthday, the *New York Times* recorded his passing⁸⁸ and the prominent obituary cited at the beginning of this essay appeared in one of Canada's leading national magazines.

This latter and otherwise impressive epitaph, while suggesting that his station in life is the main reason for Nelson's subsequent fall into historical obscurity, also shows why even the most "widely known" societal figures "outside of the realm of politics" at a given point in time cannot survive misleading and false dichotomies in our perspectives on the past. Nelson's central role as a founding member of the CIIA, for example, has frequently been overlooked, even by CIIA officials themselves, as has the fact that, because of Nelson's interests, the CIIA was created to facilitate Canadian participation in the IPR. When a brief history of the Institute was published by the CIIA in the early 1940s, his name was not included in the list of founders.⁸⁹

Nelson's historical fate is at least partly due to later being overshadowed in lists of officers by the first full-time and paid national secretary, Escott Reid, who was appointed to this position in 1932 when the CIIA created its own staff - with the financial support of, among others, Sun Life and its president,

⁸⁷ Walker, pp.56-57. See also "Rotary Head Hits Race Persecution," *New York Times*, 26 June 1934, p.20.

⁸⁸ "John Nelson Dead, Canadian Writer," *New York Times*, 25 January 1936, p.15.

⁸⁹ CIIA, *Eighteen Years of the CIIA* (Toronto: CIIA, 1946). Interestingly, an invitation/flyer received by the author in September 1997 as the CIIA sought to publicize its 1997 national foreign policy conference on the theme, "Canada and the Asia Pacific: Linking the Links," makes much of this being Canada's Year of Asia Pacific, but carries no mention of the Institute's own Pacific origins.

T.B. Macaulay⁹⁰ - and would go on to become a famous figure in Canada's official diplomatic history. Reid trumpets himself as founder of the CIIA in his memoirs, despite having come on the scene four years after the organization was established. He cites a favourable review of his activities by Raleigh Parkin, a Sun Life executive who knew both Nelson and Reid and who wrote that Reid was "the second founder of the Institute after John Nelson."⁹¹ Reid nonetheless leaves Nelson out of the discussion of the CIIA's creation 1928 and Parkin's reference is the only mention of Nelson in Reid's autobiography. This act of omission may be related to the numerous reports of conflict between Reid and older, more conservative CIIA leaders once Reid came aboard.⁹²

Institute minutes also suggest that there may have been some jousting between Reid and Nelson, with the former at one point being ordered by CIIA executives to ensure that meetings were scheduled so as to allow the latter to attend.⁹³ These records may be signs that an early effort to marginalize Nelson and others had been uncovered or they may simply represent a conflict between the interests of an institutional employee and those of some leading voluntary members, a conflict not unlike one might find between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and member states.

It would ultimately seem that when Nelson died in 1936 his seminal contribution to the life of the CIIA - acknowledged at the time⁹⁴ - was destined to be lost amidst the organizational restructuring process begun by Reid⁹⁵ and "obscured by the prominence of so many of his co-founders"⁹⁶: the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Borden (Ottawa), C.A. Bowman (Ottawa), Sir Arthur Currie (Montreal), Frederick N. Southam (Montreal), Sir Joseph Flavelle (Toronto), the Hon. Newton W. Rowell (Toronto), Charles S. MacInnes (Toronto), John W. Dafoe (Winnipeg), John MacKay (Winnipeg), Reginald W. Brock (Vancouver), and Stanley Brent (Vancouver).⁹⁷ A sociological explanation for Nelson's absence from accounts of Canadian history would thus suggest that many persons active in volunteer service groups such as the YMCA and RI did not share the same educational or class backgrounds as most Canadian intellectuals, company presidents, bureaucrats or politicians and thus have not been considered by those writing history as sophisticated or important enough to make substantial contributions to the shaping of public policy.⁹⁸ From a methodological standpoint, the absence of a single, comprehensive set of papers on John Nelson would not have helped researchers interested in telling his story.

The subsequent fate of the CIIA-IPR connection and the CIIA itself has not helped draw attention to Nelson or the IPR either;⁹⁹ nor did the dissolution of the IPR in 1960 help to enhance the attention to things Pacific which Nelson had set out to encourage. Few contemporary regional dialogues - governmental or nongovernmental - acknowledge a debt to the IPR. Instead they usually choose to reinvent the organizational wheel, ignore the questions raised by the IPR story, and overlook the potential lessons to be learned from the rise and fall of the Institute.¹⁰⁰ One reason for this is the pall cast over the

⁹⁰ Revised Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Council of the CIIA, 9 June 1932, pp.1-3, in *CIIA Minutes, Vol. I: January 1st, 1928-December 31st, 1934*, CIIA Archives. Sun Life's support covered the cost of the permanent secretary's office space; his salary was covered by a grant from the Massey Foundation.

⁹¹ Escott Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p.79.

⁹² See, for example, J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p.240; and Benjamin Rogers, "Escott Reid: Issues and Causes," *Behind the Headlines*, Vol. 50, No.1 (Autumn 1992), pp.3-4.

⁹³ Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 February 1935, p.1, in *CIIA Minutes, Vol. II: January 1st-December 31st, 1936*, CIIA Archives.

⁹⁴ CIIA, *CIIA Annual Report 1935-36* (Toronto: CIIA, 1936), p.18.

⁹⁵ Report on the Work of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1936-1937 (Toronto: CIIA, 1937), pp.9-10, in *CIIA Minutes, Vol. III*, CIIA Archives.

⁹⁶ Greathed, p.114.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Executive Council of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, p.1. Nelson and the other founders are listed here as "all the initial members of the Institute and of the Executive Council."

⁹⁸ Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp.132-59; J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, pp.13-14, 62-75, 239-43.

⁹⁹ J.L. Granatstein, "The Journal at Fifty: Then and Now," *International Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Winter 1994-95), pp.142, 153; J.L. Granatstein, "Looking Backwards: The Journal's First Year," *International Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 1977-78), p.116.

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence T. Woods, "Learning from NGO Proponents of Asia-Pacific Regionalism: Success and Its Lessons," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 9 (September 1995), pp.812-27.

IPR and all associated with it by McCarthyism in the US. There was and remains little to be gained by suggesting you were going to model your new organization after the IPR or playing up past ties.¹⁰¹

The chill which came over those in academe, the bureaucracy and government interested in the study of Asia and those interested in creating institutions to fill the void left by the subsequent collapse of the IPR remains palpable today.¹⁰² Key in the Canadian context is the treatment and fate of scholar/diplomat Herbert Norman, who had been the subject of a US Senate investigation in the early 1950s, in part because of his involvement in the IPR and, by extension, the CIA. When his name arose again in 1957 in a residual witch-hunt, he killed himself. Today, most agree that Norman was not a Communist spy and that the Americans really wanted to catch Norman's boss, Secretary of State for External Affairs and Prime Minister-to-be Lester Pearson.¹⁰³ It could hence be argued that the study of the IPR and prime movers such as Nelson has suffered because of events such as those which eventually led Norman to take his own life. As James G. Hershberg has recently observed with respect to the impact of McCarthyism in the American academic setting, "it is impossible to measure the impact of papers not written, persons not hired, subjects not taught, ideas not discussed, because scholars and students feared being tainted with charges of leftism."¹⁰⁴

The course of Canadian participation in regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific owes much to its beginnings in the mind and effort of John Nelson. One therefore wonders about the wisdom of an ahistorical approach to regional organizations.¹⁰⁵ Canadians, after all, were aboard the IPR for its entire voyage. Increased Canadian attention to things Asia-Pacific has taken a long time to be rekindled. Trade and demographic interest are again providing the impetus with military, human rights and environmental security concerns following close behind. But despite this flurry, our rediscovery of the region in this our Year of Asia Pacific could be fleeting as suggestions that Canadians would be wise to focus on the Americas given our trade reliance upon the US and the impact of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) remain prominent.¹⁰⁶

VII. Conclusion: Resituating John Nelson

This working paper has surveyed the life and thought of John Nelson in an effort to shed new light on his intellectual development and Canada's early track two diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. Given the ideas he expressed and his central role in the founding of organizations such as the IPR and CIA, this unofficial diplomacy in the inter-war period was closely linked to the concerns of John Nelson and the shift in his viewpoint. Over time he went from being what has been called a racist to being an unabashed promoter of cross-cultural understanding, the pinnacle of his activities as a goodwill ambassador evident in his service as president of RI. His life and intellectual development are thus best seen as parts of a study in international education and the potential for changing the way people think by

¹⁰¹ Woods, *Asia-Pacific Diplomacy*, p.42. For an exception, see Paul M. Evans, "The Dialogue Process on Asia Pacific Security Issues: Inventory and Analysis," in Paul M. Evans, ed., *Studying Asia Pacific Security: The Future of Research, Training and Dialogue Activities* (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1994), pp.297-316.

¹⁰² Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp.402-25; Bruce Cumings, "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies During and After the Cold War," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January-March 1997), pp.6-26.

¹⁰³ Peyton Lyon, "Isn't It Time to Let Herbert Norman Rest in Peace?," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 April 1997, p.A13; Reg Whitaker, "Spies Who Might Have Been: Canada and the Myth of Cold War Counterintelligence," Paper presented to the International Studies Association, Toronto, 19 March 1997; Miwa Kimitada, "E.H. Norman Revisited," in John Schultz and Miwa Kimitada, eds., *Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.48-58.

¹⁰⁴ James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.636.

¹⁰⁵ For Nelson's own views on the writing and forgetting of governmental history, see John Nelson, "Public Men Miserly of Memories," *Saturday Night*, 6 August 1932, p.2.

¹⁰⁶ Daphne Bramham, "Value of B.C. Exports to Asia Slips 11.2%," *Vancouver Sun*, 11 March 1997, pp.D1, D5; Edward Greenspon and Graham Fraser, "On the Fairway of Foreign Policy," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 5 April 1997, pp.D1, D3; Rudyard Griffiths, "The Day of Pearson Internationalism is Past," *Globe and Mail*, 12 April 1997, p.D3; Jeff Sallot, "Neighbourhood Watch," *Globe and Mail*, 26 April 1997, pp.D1, D9.

engaging them in the activities of cooperative nongovernmental organizations. In this case, Nelson's attitudes towards Asia, Asians, Asian cultures, Canadians of Asian ancestry, and Canadian interests in Asia were transformed by his experiences alongside those who also served as founding members of the IPR and his interaction with Asian elites, thereby making him a shining example of what can happen to individuals who receive the sort of direct international education Nelson received through his participation in the IPC, IPR, CIIA and RI. Interestingly (perhaps predictably), Nelson's "yellow journalism" of the early 1920s is conveniently overlooked in most retrospectives on his life. This may be due to a lack of understanding about international educational processes, a decision by those offering recollections to ignore this distasteful phase of his life, or an effort by Nelson himself to suppress such information.

Having rediscovered John Nelson, his initiatives and his legacy, what lessons can we draw and build upon? Perhaps the most important lesson comes when we ask if Nelson is properly situated "outside of the realm of politics"? Though never running for public office, his roles as a wordsmith, opinion leader, social activist, network builder and track two diplomat indicate that Nelson acted - and understood that he was acting - very much inside of the realm of politics. As a longtime member of the media and an astute observer of the partisan political scene, Nelson was well aware of the different ways one can have political influence. In addition to helping to create a provincial political party, he reflected and shaped public attitudes in his roles as a newspaper journalist, editor, publisher and owner. He also pursued political objectives by aiding the formation of Canadian Press, examining immigration issues, leading the first Canadian IPR delegations, providing the impetus behind the establishment of the CIIA, and promoting internationalism via Rotary.

We should be clear that the approaching APEC meeting and the People's Summits which will attempt to serve as a counterbalance are acting inside of the realm of politics as well.¹⁰⁷ As members of a society which will be affected favourably and unfavourably by the Year of Asia Pacific in the future beyond this fleeting designation, it is also true of all Canadians. We can acknowledge and learn from the earlier voyages of John Nelson and the IPR or we can deny their contemporary relevance and importance. We steer the latter course at our peril. By not striving to understand the full extent of our Asia-Pacific adventures and misadventures thus far, we at the very least risk missing the proverbial boat when it comes to influencing the nature of the vessel to be chartered and the itinerary to be followed.

Should APEC pursue a broadened conception of security like that of the IPR? If it doesn't, if it continues to insist that it is about business rather than politics, will it risk being overtaken or replaced by bolder, more holistic Asia-Pacific fora?¹⁰⁸ What of the relationships that APEC and other intergovernmental bodies now maintain with parallel nongovernmental institutions, some of which - the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific being the best example - resemble the IPR reincarnated?¹⁰⁹ Given that IPR's member councils maintained ties to their respective national governments and that one of these relationships ultimately played a major role in bringing down the organization, what should we look for in seeking constructive state-society relationships? How should state-society relations be arranged and funded in Canada to enhance our input into contemporary regional organizations? What sectors of our society were represented in IPR circles? Who did not have a voice? What sectors are engaged in domestic and international policy networks today on various issues now?

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Wallace-Deering, "1997 APEC Summit: A Threat to Christian Values?" *Topic* (Anglican Diocese of New Westminster), September 1997, p.7; John Price, "Labour Confronts APEC: Parallel Conference Slated for November," *Canadian Dimension*, July-August 1997, pp.21-22; Paul Bowles, "APEC's Brave New World Doesn't Include Labour Rights," *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 1997, p.D2; "Citizen Groups Want APEC Agenda to Address Human Rights and Sustainable Development," News Release, 1997 People's Summit on APEC, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, 25 April 1997; "Canada and APEC: Perspectives from Civil Society," Discussion paper prepared by the Policy Working Group, Canadian Organizing Network for the 1997 People's Summit on APEC, first draft, 22 April 1997; Sarah O'Donnell and J. Clark, "Anti APEC Forces On Alert," *The Ubyssy*, 11 April 1997, p.1; Robert Sarti, "Two Groups Plan to Protest APEC Summit," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 March 1997, p.B3; Maude Barlow, "Free Trade Meets the Tiger: Canada's Deadly Role in APEC," *Canadian Forum*, January/February 1997, p.9; Fatima Jaffer, "APEC and Global Capitalist Imperialism: No No No, Absolutely Not!," *Kinesis*, December/January 1997, pp.3-4; "Women's Conference Warns of Threat to Food Security from Trade Reforms," *Japan Times*, 18 November 1996, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Alden, "Asia-Pacific Forum to Avoid Rights Issue," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1997, p.A4.

¹⁰⁹ Paul M. Evans, "Building Security: The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1994), pp.125-39.

What purposes and interests do these networks serve? How representative of Canadian society are they? Whose voices are heard in APEC and other international institutions today? Who is not heard? These are questions that must be explored.

Most importantly, we must realize that many of the issues facing Canadians in 1997 are the same as those which drew an individual such as Nelson to the IPR in 1925 and then prompted him to pursue the creation of the CIIA in 1928. A Rotary colleague once remembered Nelson by suggesting that “his great service will not be in the organizations which he instituted or assisted, or changes in statutes and diplomatic codes, but in the widening of human sympathies, and the deepening of the sense of man’s essential unity. John Nelson’s work was what he lived to do rather than what he did to live.”¹¹⁰ Today, cross-cultural tensions continue to challenge Canadians; the need to turn our fabled tolerance into understanding and acceptance remains.¹¹¹ Such challenges to everyone’s security were at the heart of Nelson’s identification with the IPR’s initial objective and they continue to underlie all that APEC allegedly seeks to achieve in the name of commerce. John Nelson, “citizen of the earth” and early track two diplomat, appears to have come to understand this linkage well.

¹¹⁰ E. Leslie Pidgeon, “John Nelson: 1873-1936,” *The Rotarian*, March 1936, p.33.

¹¹¹ Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994). See also Tom Ford, “Nice? Not Really, But We Are Smug!,” *Victoria Times Colonist*, 13 April 1997, p.C3; and Gina Mallet, “Has Diversity Gone Too Far?,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 March 1997, pp.D1-2.